

Mennell, F. P. — AFRICA — South Rhodesia
Mr & Mrs Nash and Family — 1903

RHODESIA MUSEUM, BULAWAYO

Special Report.

The Zimbabwe Ruins.

By F. P. MENNELL, F.G.S.,
Curator.



Bulawayo:
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ALL over Southern Rhodesia are to be found the remains of stone buildings or enclosures regarding the origin of which there has been much speculation, and much trouble has needlessly been taken in endeavouring to show by means of trees growing upon the walls, and similar evidence, that they must be of considerable antiquity. The Arabs first brought them to the notice of Europeans at the beginning of the 16th century, when they gave accounts of them to the Portuguese and stated with perfect truth that they were better built than the Portuguese forts.¹ They ascribed a great antiquity to them and it is noteworthy that they had no traditions as to the builders. It is at once obvious that they are far beyond the capabilities of any of the Kaffir tribes. We know, moreover, from the statements of early Arab writers² that this part of Africa has since the time of Mahomet at any rate, been inhabited solely by Kaffirs, and it seems certain therefore, that the building of these now ruined structures must be referred back at least to the commencement of the Christian era.

NATIVE TRADITION.

Some writers have dealt at length with native ideas regarding the ruins, despite the entire unreliability of such evidence. The Matabele, who are themselves new-comers, say they were built by the "Abalozi" for cattle kraals, and this is usually held to refer to some of their predecessors in the country. There is nothing to connect the latter, as some writers have done, with the Barotse, but it is interesting to

1. See De Barros, *Da Asia*, etc., also Wilmot, *Monomotapa and Theat. Beginnings of South African History*.

2. El-Masudi, *Meadows of Gold*, el-Edrisi, and others.

find that the Makalanga themselves sometimes talk of the "Abarozwe" as the builders, and I am informed that the remnant of such a tribe does exist in Mashonaland. Further information on this point would be of great interest, though it may have no bearing on the question of the ruins. Tylor¹ accepts the ruins as of native origin, and therefore as evidences of degeneration on the part of the natives, though he admits² that good evidences of degeneration are exceedingly rare. The general tenour of native tradition on the subject is quite at variance with such an idea. They will tell you that the ruins have always been there or that they are built by "the Umlimo" (the devil, as the Portuguese writers express it.) Other accounts are that they were built when stones were soft,³ or that stones in those days grew like trees⁴ and were sliced up as one might do a carrot—in fact precisely what are met with in every part of the world where ruins exist which have been there as long as the tribes themselves who offer the explanations.

THE ZIMBABWE RUINS.

Zimbabwe has always been accounted to have been the most important centre in ancient times. It was principally to the ruins there that the Arabs referred in their reports to the Portuguese, who lost hundreds of men in vainly trying to reach them. Bent relates a curious native story⁵ about the ruins having been built by white men who died through the natives poisoning their water. This report doubtless owed its origin to the building of forts by the Portuguese, and Portuguese records bear witness to the fact that many of Barreto's expedition (1572), actually did die⁶ through the poisoning of their water, for which seventeen "Moors" were shot. The Arabs themselves informed the Portuguese that Rhodesia (Monomotapa) was the scriptural Ophir, and in later times vague rumours about the ruins and old workings gave rise to the reports of "King Solomon's Mines" in the interior. The first authentic account of the ruins was that of Karl Mauch (1874), who visited them in 1871. After the occupation of the country by the B.S.A. Company, general attention was attracted to them, and Mr. Theodore Bent in

1. *Primitive culture*, vol. i., p. 47.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

3. Phillips, *Proc. R.G.S.*, 1891, p. 20.

4. I owe this information to Mr. Taberer, N.C.

5. *Ruined Cities of Mashonaland*, p. 82.

6. Wilmot, *Monomotapa*, p. 182.

1890 made the first systematic excavations, which laid the foundations of our present knowledge of the ruins. The work which Mr. Hall is now carrying out on behalf of the B.S.A. Company in removing debris and undergrowth has enabled me to gain a much better idea of the main ruins than has hitherto been possible for visitors. Previous excavators had little regard to those who might come after them, depositing their debris on the tops of walls and in some cases completely concealing important features. Mr. Hall's work has been more carefully executed, and it is to be hoped that the Government will make some permanent arrangement of a similar character to ensure the preservation of these unique structures, an archæological heritage such as no other part of the British Empire can boast.

SITUATION.

The ruins themselves are situated somewhat S.E. of the intersection of the 20th parallel of S. latitude and the 31st meridian E. of Greenwich. They are about 16 miles from the town of Victoria and 230 from Sofala, which is due East and the nearest point on the coast. Zimbabwe is on a water parting, some of the streams near flowing into the Tokwe, and thence by the Lundi into the Sabi, and others by the Mtelekwe into the Sabi, which falls into the sea about 60 miles south of Sofala. It has been suggested that the ancients sailed up the Sabi River for a considerable distance, but however this may be, it does not appear probable that they were able to come at all close to Zimbabwe. The ruins are splendidly situated for purposes of defence. Those on the hill are practically impregnable, and have been much strengthened artificially. They overlook an immense stretch of country, and care has been taken to erect what are evidently small forts on every eminence around, whilst chains of forts at intervals of ten miles or so have been traced in many directions, and obviously served for the protection of the roads. The country around is very fertile, and it is probable that the unhealthy swamps to the South were rendered innocuous by drainage, as could easily be done at the present time. It is curious that though gold mining seems to have been the main object of the "ancients" and many gold ornaments have been found in the ruins, there are no old workings within a radius of about twenty miles. It is true that the buildings are on granite, but the metamorphic rocks of the gold belt approach within a few miles.

DERIVATION OF THE NAME.

Zimbabwe is, of course, a native name, and according to several gentlemen who are well acquainted with the native language, it is derived from "zimba," a place, and "ibgwe," plural "mabgwe," a stone, so that it would mean place or building of stones.¹ Others have suggested that it means place of the king, which would accord well with the idea that it was given to the residence of the Monomotapa, once the paramount chief of the country, to which his name was even applied by the Portuguese. They inform us that any place where the Monomotapa had his court was called Zimbabwe, while on the other hand they state that his kraal was a marvellous building of stones, ascribed by natives to the devil, as it was quite beyond their power to build. I have tried to reconcile this latter statement with what we know of the Monomotapa's head kraal. Though this may have been shifted occasionally it seems to have always been close to Mount Fura, indeed, the name Monomotapa may mean "lord of the mountain," and it is said that the chief would not allow any of the Portuguese to ascend Mount Fura for fear harm should come to him. Now it is certain that few or none of the latter ever saw the ruins, as many must have done if they were really near Mount Fura, and it seems quite evident that the ruin stories, as may indeed be inferred from the descriptions, really referred to what we now call Zimbabwe. How then did it get the name? Were the Portuguese wrong in thinking that the name really applied primarily to the chief's residence? I am inclined to think they were. It does not seem probable that the natives would give the same name to the great stone edifices at Zimbabwe as that they had been accustomed to call the kraal of a chief who lived hundreds of miles away. From the Portuguese accounts there were evidently many Zimbabwes, and it seems probable that the name was the regular one for the ruins. At any rate even the Matabele know of such an application. While I was at the Khami ruins not long ago the natives were asked what they called the ruins. They replied, "Tangala," which simply means "walls." On being pressed as to any special name, they said that the old men called them "Zimbakwe," which is almost exactly the Makalanga pronunciation. Such evidence, indeed, seems practically conclusive, and goes far also to sustain the derivation already suggested.

1. This appears to have been first suggested by Mr. Selous, *Geographical Journal*, vol. i., p. 316.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RUINS.

The kopje on which one group of ruins is situated occupies a most commanding position. The North-East side is quite inaccessible, and from each end of the smooth face of rock which protects it a wall extends, which must originally have enclosed the main group of ruins on the plain and have been between two and three miles in circumference. The great care taken on the hill in strengthening an already almost inaccessible position seems to show that the builders (who may be termed "the ancients" for want of a better name), were menaced by a large hostile population, and there can be little doubt, as suggested by Bent,¹ that the buildings below were not erected till they had made good their footing in the country. The great elliptical building on the plain, is, however, so well preserved and of such importance that it is well to take it into consideration before referring to the other ruins.

THE TEMPLE.

The temple, as this remarkable structure has universally and correctly been termed, is undoubtedly the most interesting in many respects of all the Rhodesian monuments, and the fact that its walls still rise in places to a height of 30 feet has caused it to attract a large share of attention. It stands at the southern extremity of the complex of ruined walls and is constructed without mortar, but with great regularity and solidity. The part of the wall which extends without a break from the West to the North entrance varies in thickness from about 10 to 16 feet at the base and narrows to about 8 or 9 feet at the top. The dressed rectangular blocks of granite with which it is faced probably average about 6 x 12 inches on the outside, being rather larger than those at most other ruins. The inside blocks are much more roughly trimmed, but the regularity of the courses is preserved throughout the thickness of the wall. A double row of chevron pattern extends for a considerable distance round the outside of the wall near the top, the central part facing about S.E. Monoliths of granite are fixed in the top of the wall, and if these originally projected at all, it can never have been more than a few courses higher. The northerly walls are not so thick, but they are of similar construction, and there is no reason to suppose with Mr. Bent that they are of later date. If the

^{1.} *Ruined Cities*, p. 371.

southern portion has stood down to the present day, it is hardly conceivable that the original northern part should have required to be rebuilt at a remote period : it is much more reasonable to suppose that where the enclosure is joined by the walls of other ruins, so great a thickness was not considered necessary as on the South, where there are no outlying buildings. The ends of the walls are rounded off on either side of the three entrances, which lie North, North-West and nearly West of the centre of the building. The Western entrance has two rounded buttresses of unequal size on the inside. These buttresses are simply built up against the main wall and the blocks do not dovetail into those of the wall in any way. The same thing applies to all walls meeting at an angle, a fact which renders it very easy to suggest that any particular one may be of later date than some other. The interior of the temple is divided up into separate enclosures by numerous walls, some of which are straight and others curved. They vary greatly in thickness, and while some are as well constructed as the exterior walls, others are much more roughly built but still essentially similar. The clearing away of the rubbish which formerly obscured all details has revealed a number of interesting features. The entrances to the various enclosures usually have the ends of the walls rounded off on either side, those of what was apparently the most important division (that termed by Willoughby No. 1) are both, however, rounded on the inside and square on the outside. Nearly all the entrances are built in such a way as to remind one of the stone stiles seen in England. The walls rise a foot or two above the floor level and there are steps on either side. The different enclosures were evidently at slightly different levels, those nearest the centre being the highest. Traces of cement flooring, which has been disregarded by previous excavators, are everywhere to be found. That this was part of the original plan is shown by another feature and itself throws light upon the latter. At intervals along the outer wall are square holes which penetrate it from side to side, and have caused much discussion as to their use. Bent came to the conclusion that they could not be drains, which they much resembled, no doubt from the fact that it was difficult to see how they could carry off the water. Willoughby concluded that they were drains, as he found they were flush with the floor. The recent clearing of the remarkable passage way which leads from the North entrance to the cone, leaves no room for doubt on the point. There is a well made floor of cement running all along the passage,

rising and falling slightly in places and with occasional steps. Wherever a hole occurs—and a number have now been found—it is exactly at the level of the floor, and further it has been found that similar holes open on to the passage through the inner wall. Similar drains have been discovered in places on the hill, and the fact that such careful provision was made for carrying off the rainfall is in itself sufficient to shew that the builders possessed a considerable degree of civilization.

THE CONE.

The most remarkable feature of the temple is undoubtedly the great cone at its South-Eastern end. This object, apparently unique in Rhodesia, is sufficient to shew the religious character of the building, for here we have beyond question the symbol of nature worship, a cult which long flourished amongst the Phoenicians and other Semitic races, and which has survived down to the present day in a few obscure localities. It is frequently referred to in the Old Testament, and the orgies connected with its observance, associated with the worship of Venus, gave notoriety to the Isle of Cyprus. If further evidence is needed of the religion of the builders, we have it in the phalli which have been unearthed in the great passage almost under the shadow of the cone, as well as upon the hill. Like the walls around, the cone is built of granite blocks and is solid throughout, as has been proved by several investigators who have not hesitated to pull down portions of it for the purpose. It is much to be deplored that this remarkable structure should have been subjected to so much unnecessary vandalism. The destruction appears to have been commenced by Karl Mauch, who destroyed most of the dentelle pattern which ran round it a few feet below the original top, and took out a number of stones from the West side. Bent, however, did much more serious harm, and the hole he made on the South side of the cone is likely to cause its collapse at no distant date unless steps are taken to rebuild the damaged portion. The "smaller cone" which stands by the side of the large one,¹ has already been almost demolished by the growth of a large tree close by.

THE HILL RUINS.

The hill ruins are situated North of the temple and the hill itself rises abruptly to over 200 feet above the plain. Two

1. Is it possible that this object, of which only a few courses remain, is the altar?

passages leading to the top have now been cleared out, and that on the Southern side of the hill, where all the most important buildings appear to have been situated, is especially interesting. It leads in a zig-zag course up an almost perpendicular face of rock and its construction evinces considerable engineering skill in the way difficulties are surmounted ; indeed, standing at the foot of the slope, it is difficult to believe that the ascent is practicable. It has (or had) walls on either side, and seems to have been paved with stone blocks, while it gives access to a number of enclosures on the way up. Near the top it traverses a cleft in the rock about two feet wide and some fifty feet in length, and is finally carried along the edge of the cliff, overlooked by a wall on which stand five monoliths, to the foot of the elevated platform at the North-East end of what has been termed the "Western Temple." The platform itself is reached by a narrow winding passage through two covered entrances, while on the other side of it a series of steps lead past a dentelle pattern into a more northerly enclosure. On the platform are two granite monoliths still in position, and one of schist which has fallen. The Western wall of the enclosure is of special interest owing to its great thickness, careful construction and the unique decoration of round towers and monoliths placed alternately along the summit. It is from this part of the hill that the talc or "soapstone" birds were taken by Mr. Bent, and it is certainly regrettable that we have no records of their original situations. The one lately found by Mr. Hall had evidently fallen from the Northern wall of the enclosure where only a single rough granite monolith is now in position.

THE EASTERN ENCLOSURES.

One of the most Easterly enclosures on the South side of the hill has been termed the "Eastern Temple" by Mr. Bent. It has a well constructed curved wall with a dentelle pattern which probably extended all round the outside from South to East, though there is now a big gap on the South-East. A cemented floor, rising to the north in terraces, is still traceable, and the ground on which the lower part is laid has been rendered level by filling in with stones as far as the retaining wall. A rounded entrance gives access by a way carried across a cleft in the rock to what Mr. Bent has termed the gold furnace enclosure. I am inclined to agree with Mr. Hall that the so-called gold furnace was nothing more than a Makalanga iron furnace, and that the "rejected casings" of

the reef ("banded ironstone") which Mr. Bent speaks of are in reality the leavings of the ore smelted, as they would yield an excellent quality of iron and are of the same nature as the natives smelted until the industry became practically extinct as it is at present. It is only right, however, to mention that Sir John Willoughby¹ found in the cleft below "numerous fragments of clay crucibles containing small beads of gold," so that whatever the nature of the furnace, it is quite possible that gold smelting was here carried on. There were evidently other walls still further East, but only traces of them now remain.

SOME ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES.

On the North side of the "Eastern Temple" there are two passages between the clefts in the rock. One leads on to the North slope of the hill, while the other ascends to a kind of platform, the highest bit of building that remains, which commands an extensive view towards the North and the South-east. On the other side it is cut off by towering rocks. Round the West side of the "Temple" runs a passage which presents a feature of great interest in the shape of a curious recess. This is roughly rectangular in form with the rounded-off end of a wall at one side and a boulder at the other. A curious system of steps runs towards the wall at the back, but does not admit of its ascent. Just below there is an enclosure with a rounded exterior wall which has six spaces left, evidently for the insertion of posts. It is of interest to note that some excavations recently made at the Khami Ruins near Bulawayo have revealed similar features. A passage-way leading up to the highest point of what has always been regarded as the main ruin has a similar stepped recess near the base and there are post holes along the passage, in at least two of which were found vestiges of wooden posts. Mr. Franklin White found similar post holes at Dhlo-Dhlo and recently also at Regina ruins, and in each case remains of wooden posts were discovered. It has been suggested that these wooden posts were not original, but were inserted at a comparatively recent period in place of earlier stone ones. This is, however, mere conjecture, probably arising from doubts as to the probable antiquity of the wood, and even apart from the question as to the likelihood of any one undertaking repairs of the ruins, there is

¹. *Further Excavations at Zimbabwe*, p. 9.

every indication that they have stood from the time the buildings were erected. It may also be mentioned that in the case of many entrances there is a space left on either side for a post, and in some instances stone posts are still found in position. As there seems no reason why the posts, if of stone, should have vanished in other cases, it appears probable that wood was a material largely employed.

A detailed description of the remaining enclosures cannot be given here, and a few brief remarks must suffice. One striking feature of which mention must be made is the remarkable passage leading from one of the Southern enclosures into an upper enclosure North-east of the platform. It is a narrow cleft in the rock, perhaps 3 feet wide, and for some reason it has angular buttresses built alternately on opposite sides which make the pathway barely admit of ascent. It is now impossible to actually get into the higher enclosure, but this appears to be due to the collapse of some of the masonry. The upper enclosure itself is notable for the great cleft rocks which bound it on most sides and the fine square entrance by which it is approached from the West. Inside this are round buttresses with spaces for posts on either side. The Kaffir occupation of the Northern side of the hill has resulted in much destruction, though here and there interesting bits remain, such as the fine wall following the contour of some of the great boulders, and the cracks, sometimes only a few inches wide, carefully filled in with masonry. One passage way has been cleared out for a considerable distance, and at the base of the hill where it originally ended there is the only example of "herring bone" ornamentation yet found at Zimbabwe, where decorative patterns are remarkably rare. Extensive excavations would be necessary to gain an adequate idea of the original aspect of this side of the hill and should yield much valuable information when they can be performed.

ORIENTATION, ETC.

In descriptions of a number of ruins, and of Zimbabwe in particular, a great feature has been made by several writers of supposed systems of orientation which were said to be observable. In Mr. Bent's work there is a special chapter contributed by Mr. Robert Swan on orientation and measurements which has attracted considerable attention, and Mr. Swan subsequently extended his theories to other ruins in a paper read before the Anthropological Institute in 1896. Mr. Franklin White was the first to independently investigate

the points on which stress was laid by Mr. Bent, and in his excellent description of the Dhlo-Dhlo ruins¹ he showed that there at least none of the rules enunciated in Mr. Bent's book are found to apply. I accordingly paid special attention to the matter and carefully went into the facts on which Mr. Swan's theories are based. It is at once evident, as Mr. Swan himself admits, that "the plan of the great temple suggests that the architects had carelessly drawn a great ellipse on the ground and built round it, getting occasionally out of line and leaving occasional doorways," but he nevertheless comes to the conclusion "that what were regarded as careless irregularities in construction are, in reality, carefully constructed architectural features," though it is obvious that he takes no account of them in many of his subsequent calculations. It would be waste of time to go into these in detail, but there are some points which cannot be passed over. It will be obvious from a mere inspection of the plan that there is no apparent purpose in the direction of the long axis of the building or in the position of the cone or of the chevron pattern on the wall: they do not bear any definite relation to the rising or the setting of the sun or its greatest altitude. The only basis for assuming the ancients to have taken astronomical phenomena into consideration in their building operations is consequently the position of the altar, which according to the plan in Mr. Bent's book is situated on a line, which if continued through the main entrance, would point due North. There are, however, no signs of his having made any excavations at the spot indicated; indeed, much of his debris was deposited upon it. Now that this has been cleared away, it even appears that there is a wall running through the supposed site. The altar therefore seems to have no existence in point of fact,² and all theories based on its assumed position consequently fall to the ground. The same thing applies to the hill, where there are no traces of an altar in the so-called "Eastern Temple" and where the supposed altar in the "Western Temple" is evidently, as Sir John Willoughby suggested, part of a ruined wall.

Another point on which stress was laid by Mr. Swan was an assumed standard of measurement adopted in the construction of walls both at Zimbabwe and other ruins. Thus, according to Mr. Swan,³ "the diameter of the great tower

1. *Journ. Anthropol. Inst.*, vol. xxxi., p. 28.

2. In the *Geographical Journal*, vol. i., Mr. Swan admits that the altar is purely supposititious, and Dr. Schlichter (p. 371) points out that this is nevertheless the only basis of his theories.

3. *Ruined Cities*, p. 152.

-seems to have represented the unit of measure in the construction of the curves of the outer walls and all the regularly curved inner walls." He further states that the "diameter of the great tower at its base is 17.17 feet, or 10 cubits, and this is exactly equal to the circumference of the little tower." It is elsewhere stated by Mr. Bent that "by digging to their foundations" very accurate measurements of the cones were obtained. Personally, I am unable to see how the figures were arrived at. On the Northern side of the large cone there are cement steps abutting upon it which effectually prevent any measurements being taken for some distance above the base, so that it is evident that the circumference must have been computed by some indirect method, a fact which should have been stated. In any case the best measurements that could be obtained give the circumference as 57 feet about on a level with the floor, whence we arrive at a diameter of $17\frac{1}{2}$ feet, which scarcely accords with Mr. Swan's figure. The "smaller tower" has its foundations on the cement floor (the larger one goes down below), and as all debris has now been removed, measurements can be made with as great accuracy as the nature of the structure allows. The figure I arrived at for the circumference was 21 feet 3 inches, which can in no way be reconciled with Mr. Swan's deductions. Yet upon a basis which is now shown to be unsound, a theory has been founded which can only give rise to the gravest misconceptions, and some of its consequences are even more serious. In my opinion none of the walls are sufficiently regular to admit of any theoretical deductions being made from them. Yet when their radius of curvature (some, by the way, are portions of the *ellipse*), cannot be brought into supposed agreement with the system of measurement based on the diameter of the great tower, all discrepancies are removed by regarding any such parts of the buildings as "rough reconstructions of older walls." Among these "rough reconstructions" it may be stated, is the magnificent Western wall on the hill with its unique decoration of monoliths and round towers.

Reference is also made in Mr. Bent's work to supposed observations of Northern stars, though no evidence is adduced in support of the statement. If the ancients had any such observations in view when building their enclosures, they certainly selected a very unsuitable site. Most of the buildings on the hill have the view to the North entirely cut off by the great granite boulders, and the majority of monoliths supposed to have been utilised as gnomons are on

the Southern walls both there and in the temple. The remainder are to the West, and the only ones with a Northern aspect are those which formerly stood on the divisional wall of the so-called "Western Temple" which is not an external wall as would be expected, and has a large part of the view interrupted by boulders. I have already referred to the platform overlooking this part of the hill. It has upon it two large monoliths, one upright and the other slanting, which is supposed to have been its original position. Here, if anywhere, one would be disposed to find evidences of astronomical observations being made, and it is remarkable that Mr. Swan has no definite suggestions to make on the point. I should not, indeed, like to say that observations of some kind were not made, but considering how elementary and empirical were ancient notions of astronomy, it is certainly remarkable that the relative positions of the monoliths do not immediately suggest their object. It is needless to discuss their relations to a possible altar, for here again, as I have stated, there is no evidence of such a structure having ever existed. I can only conclude that if the ancients had any system of orientation or measurement, we have not yet arrived at any reliable conclusion as to its nature.

ORIGIN OF THE RUINS.

Having reviewed some of the principal features presented by the Zimbabwe Ruins, a few remarks may be made on the vexed question of their origin. It is, as has already been stated, inconceivable that the Kaffirs who now inhabit the country could have been builders, and we have the testimony of El-Masudi (soon after 900 A.D.) to show that in his time there were Kaffirs here who had the same customs as now. No people without a written language can be expected to hand down traditions for an unlimited time, but we have seen that an event of 350 years ago, distorted it is true, has survived to the present day. It is therefore evident that if a foreign occupation of the country had taken place within several hundred years previously, it would have left some traditions behind it, which the Arabs would certainly have heard, and as an Arab inscription dating from 713 A.D. has recently been brought to light,¹ we are forced to concede a remote antiquity to the ruins.

Now the most remarkable feature of the ancient occupation is its connection with workings for gold. All over the

¹. See Lane-Poole, *Proc. R.I.A.*, vol. xxiv., sect. C, part 2, pp. 47-54.

country are old shafts ; some no doubt worked by the natives at Arab instigation, as Portuguese records show ; many, however, obviously connected with the ruins. We find, too, in the ruins a profusion of gold ornaments of every description, far superior in style and method of workmanship to anything of native manufacture. It is this fact above all that has turned people's minds in the direction of the scriptural Ophir, of the riches of Tyre and Sidon, and of King Solomon's expeditions in search of gold. All the Arab geographers refer to the country inland from Sofala as a land of gold, but there is even earlier evidence. For we find¹ Kosmas Indicopleustes, an Egyptian monk, writing in 547 A.D. of a Southern land near the ocean with abundant gold mines. He further states that the King of Aksum in Abyssinia sent expeditions to the country which took six months to go and return. The people who made the journey bartered oxen for gold with the natives, and there can be little doubt but that the country was Rhodesia,² when we read that "the winter of those regions coincides with the summer amongst us." It is tolerably certain that the natives did not dispose of the gold in a manufactured state, and there does not seem any reason to connect this traffic with the ruins. It is, however, a very significant fact that at Aksum there are ruins similar in many respects to those of Rhodesia, but with conclusive evidence of their origin. In Rhodesia not a single inscription has yet been brought to light, although assertions to the contrary have been made, but in the case of the Abyssinian remains, readable Himyaritic (Sabæan) inscriptions were found. Now the Aksumites appear to be closely connected with the Sabæans, and in fact conquered them about 520 A.D., so it is possible that their gold-seeking expeditions were a continuation on land of those of the Sabæans by sea. Eratosthenes, in the second century before Christ, states that the Sabæans were hardy mariners and established colonies abroad, and that no other nation was so rich. The Periplus of the Red Sea, written in the first or second century of the Christian era, shews that there were Arabian colonies on the East Coast of Africa. Further we find that Mombasa was part of the Sabæan territory, and

1. I am indebted for many of the particulars given below to the very valuable introduction to Torrend's *Comparative Grammar of the S.A. Bantu Languages*.

2. It need scarcely be pointed out that until the Zambesi was reached the difference between Summer and Winter would be inappreciable. Even here it is not very great, owing to the distribution of the rainfall.

reference is made to King Kharibael who dwelt at Saphar (modern Dhofar), in Southern Arabia, a place which seems unquestionably to be the scriptural Ophir. This Sabæan king sent ships with men who knew the country and language well to bring back gold from the African coast. It accordingly seems that there is strong presumptive evidence in favour of the ruins having an intimate connection with the Sabæans and the Ophir of the Bible, even if they were not actually erected by the Arabian race.

The theory that the Phœnicians built the ruins seems, on the other hand, to have little to recommend it, and appears to have been based chiefly on the evidence of the phallic worship, a form of religion common to the Sabæans and other races. Messrs. Perrot & Chipiez have pointed out that no inland Phœnician town is known.¹ The buildings too, are quite unlike anything of undoubted Phœnician origin² in many points which appear to be of fundamental importance. For instance, the very mark of Phœnician architecture is the large size of the stones employed, while one of the most striking points about the Rhodesian ruins is the remarkable smallness of the granite blocks. It is curious, indeed, that on a dish figured by Perrot & Chipiez³ we see depicted a man setting out to hunt a lion from what would do very well for one of the Rhodesian structures. Such a fact, however, proves no more than that the Phœnicians were possibly acquainted with such a type of building, as they must have been if the Rhodesian ruins are really similar to those of Southern Arabia. The irregular curving outlines of the walls are also without parallel amongst undoubted Phœnician remains, and the entire absence, not only of inscriptions, but also of all the well-known Phœnician emblems, from the carvings and ornaments seems of itself sufficient to demolish the theory. Hall and Neal endeavour to satisfy all parties by the supposition that the country was first occupied by the Sabæans and later by the Phœnicians, and attempt to justify it by enumerating certain supposed differences between various groups of ruins. Considering how little is known concerning early Sabæan architecture and the wide divergence of the Rhodesian monuments from anything certainly

1. *History of Art in Phœnicia*, vol. i., p. 385.

2. Mr. Bent ridiculed the Phœnician theory and stated some objections to it at a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in 1890. His own researches quite failed to remove them, but he does not even allude to them in his book. See *Proc. R.G.S.*, 1891, p. 19.

3. *History of Art in Phœnicia*, vol. ii., p. 34.

Phœnician, it is altogether premature to put forward such ideas, apart from the fact that historical evidence is against them. For whereas Tyre was destroyed in 322 B.C., the Sabæans continued to flourish and had relations with Africa for centuries after the commencement of the Christian era. There are, of course, the scriptural references to the fleets sent out by Solomon and Hiram, King of Tyre, the chief city of the Phœnicians. It has accordingly been contended that in Rhodesia we have the biblical Ophir and that it was to this country that Solomon's expeditions for gold were despatched in the track of many previous Phœnician ones. The difficulties in the way of such a supposition appear insurmountable. It seems to be demonstrated beyond a doubt that "Ophir" was, as has been stated, in Southern Arabia, and there is everything in favour of the view, ably supported by Professor Keane,¹ that the place was the emporium to which the gold was brought. Now the Phœnicians certainly would not have gone to Ophir for their gold if they themselves were in possession of the gold-bearing country. Keane's contention that Rhodesia is "Havilah" is obviously unsound, for how could Saul smite the Amalekites "from Havilah till thou comest to Shur, which is over against Egypt?"² Burton is probably correct in identifying it with El-Khaulan³ on the Red Sea. As to the Rhodesian ruins, there is no definite evidence to show that they were not the work of an indigenous race, and there are many difficulties to be explained away before any theory of their origin can be expected to meet with general acceptance. It certainly seems probable that Rhodesia was the source, or one of the sources, of the "Gold of Ophir," and that the gold was brought thence by the Sabæans. Whether the Sabæans themselves erected the remarkable structures under consideration is quite another matter, and no definite conclusion regarding it can be reached until further evidence is available.

1. *The Gold of Ophir*, London, 1902.

2. *Samuel*, xv.

3. *Gold Mines of Midian*, p. 254.

View from Zimbabwe Hill.





Fig. 1.—The Temple, Zimbabwe.



Fig. 2.—Zimbabwe Hill, from the Temple.



Part of Temple Wall, from South.

Pl. 4.

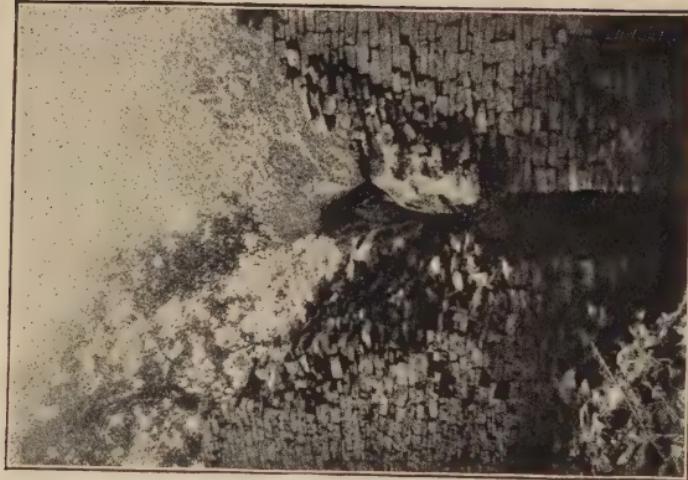


Fig. 1.—Way up the Hill.

Fig. 2. Passage through Cleft.

Fig. 3.—A Square Entrance.



Fig. 1.—Wall on Hill, from West.



Fig. 2.—Curving Wall on Hill.

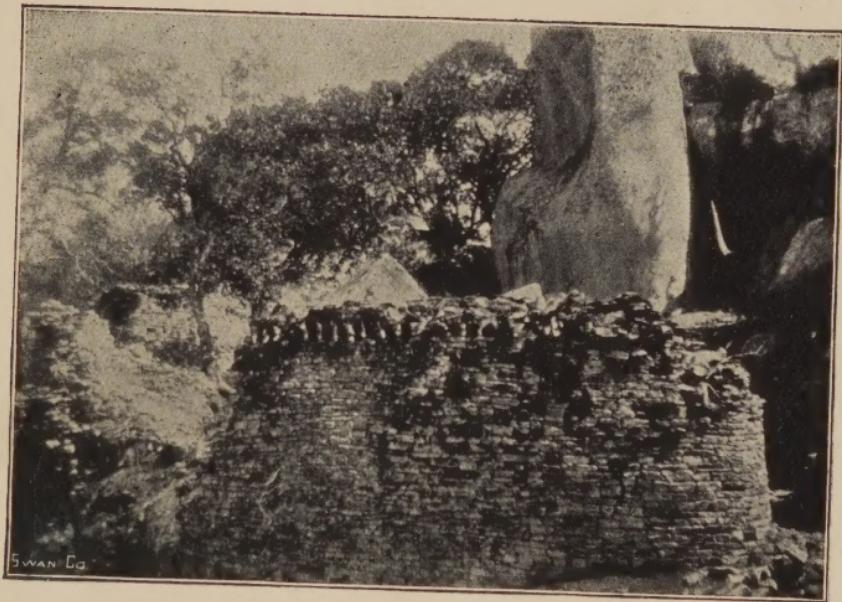


Fig. 1.—Enclosure on Hill, from East.



Fig. 2.—Wall with Spaces for Posts.

